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UNCLAS YEREVAN 001420

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: "CENSORSHIP" AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

REF: YEREVAN 1083

(U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

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EDITORIAL ALLEGES GOVERNMENT ACTION TO UNDERCUT OMBUDSMAN  
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1. (SBU) In a short editorial comment on August 3 titled "Either Together, or Not on the Air," opposition newspaper Aravot alleged that the Kocharian Administration "ordered" Armenian television companies to provide air time to Ombudsman Larisa Alaverdyan only if she appeared in programs with "August 23 National Alliance" chairman Pushkin Serobyanyan. The editorial in Aravot asserted that two unnamed television stations inexplicably canceled requests for Alaverdyan to appear "within hours of one another," after receiving the order from the President's office. Aravot Editor-in-Chief Aram Abrahamyan, who returned August 4 from an editors conference in Vienna, told us he could not disclose the "reliable source" cited in the editorial. (Note: Pushkin Serobyanyan is a self-proclaimed "human rights defender" who served a number of years in prison for abuse of power as a high-ranking police official. End Note.)

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OMBUDSMAN CLAIMS ARAVOT ALLEGATIONS TRUE  
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2. (SBU) Armenian Ombudsman Larisa Alaverdyan told us that pro-government ALM and Shant television stations had canceled invitations for her to appear, while producers at Burg and Kentron stations told her she would have to appear with Serobyanyan. Alaverdyan said she refused to associate with Serobyanyan, who "has a criminal past," and canceled her Burg and Kentron appearances herself. Alaverdyan repeated allegations that government authorities are working to undercut her criticism of the GOAM's human rights record (reftel), alleging "now they are trying to keep me away from television."

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TV STATIONS DENY ALLEGATIONS  
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3. (SBU) A senior news program host at Burg television told us he invited Alaverdyan after Burg aired an interview with Pushkin Serobyanyan. In the interview, he said, Serobyanyan blasted Alaverdyan as the head of an "ineffective" Office of the Ombudsman. The program host said his directors wanted Alaverdyan's response, that Alaverdyan has an open invitation to appear alone, and that he has no contact with the president's office. A senior news program host at Kentron television told us he wanted Alaverdyan and Serobyanyan to appear on the same program, but Alaverdyan refused. An ALM television news director told us ALM had not invited Alaverdyan, but planned to do so now. We could not reach the Shant television program host, who is currently on vacation.

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COMMENT: TRUE, FALSE, OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN?  
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4. (SBU) Aravot editor-in-chief Aram Abrahamyan, who is usually quick to point his finger, told us he could not disclose the source cited in the editorial. He did, however, hint to us that Serobyanyan might be gunning for Alaverdyan's position as Armenia's human rights defender. Producers at ALM, Burg and Kentron have dismissed the Aravot allegations as untrue and, in the process, have directly contradicted Alaverdyan's claims. The only sure thing in the ongoing Human Rights Defender soap opera is that allegations will likely continue.

GODFREY